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US admits chemical weapons tests

Veterans fear they were exposed to dangerous agents

By Nick Childs

BBC Pentagon correspondent

The Pentagon has published previously secret information revealing that it carried out more extensive tests of chemical and biological warfare agents than had previously been thought.

The tests took place in the 1960s and early 70s.

Tests were also carried out in Britain and Canada, although the Americans say the British and Canadian governments published information on these some years ago.

Test sites

- Alaska
- Florida
- Hawaii
- Maryland
- Utah
- Britain
- Canada

In all some 5,500 US military personnel were involved.

The Pentagon has previously revealed information on tests of chemical and biological warfare agents aboard US Navy ships at sea.

Now, for the first time, it has given details of similar tests on American soil - in Alaska, Florida, Hawaii, Maryland and Utah - as well as

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in Britain and Canada.

Veterans concerned

In some of these tests actual toxic agents, including sarin and VX, were released but more than half used simulated agents.

The aim of the tests, the Pentagon insists, was to evaluate equipment, procedures and military tactics and not to check the effects on people.

Personnel wore protective suits.

Civilians were exposed to the simulated agents, Pentagon officials say, but they add that these were harmless and the US military insists it has no evidence that anyone suffered medical effects from the tests at the time.

But in large part the reason for revealing this information now and for briefing the US Congress, as the Pentagon has been doing, is because of concerns expressed by veterans.

More than 50 of them have filed claims because of health concerns and fears they were exposed to dangerous substances.

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